

# Some problems about music teaching for preschool and primary school ages in Vietnam currently

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**Abstract:** *We are living in the 21st century, but music is still classified as a “minor” subject, not really considered important at all levels of education. While in reality, music contributes to bringing positive spiritual and intellectual health values to students, especially at preschool and elementary school ages. Therefore, changing prejudices and valuing music subject right at the preschool and elementary school levels is a must to promoting social development and better maturing for the children.*

**Keywords:** *Music; teaching; preschool and elementary school ages.*

## **Performance and effects of music on our infants and toddlers**

Firstly, the art of music can help strengthen children's physical ability at the very young age.

Aside from the spiritual attributes of young children, their physical development and growth also significantly perks if music and physicality are interconnected with one another. We are mentioning all the essential aspects, from the raw basis of locomotion to the complex sensual nervous system of cortexes.

First and foremost, normal development of a human starts with motor skills, both fine and gross for that matter. For any baby, gross motor comes before fine motor. For pre-K children, they are normally trying instruments, clapping, dancing, and moving to songs. Now fine motor skill is the ability to perform with a set of small and acute muscles belonging to the human wrists, palms, and arms. As a cherry on top, an AEP-ARTS article has evidence also pointing out that musically-trained students have better motor functions compared to non-musical students. Without a doubt, when the child finally achieved playing a musical instrument, their parents would see how their locomotion skills have evolved.

Once again, the sensory and cortex system cannot be unnamed when it comes to music education. First off is the hearing system, your child will indisputably develop his or her auditory cortices. Secondly comes his or her somatosensory cortex, which means they get improved feelings when touching simple musical instruments and enhanced commands of limbs as well as other body parts. Lastly, not as significant as the previous two but just as vital are the children's eyes, their visual cortices. Certainly, musical activities either in kindergarten or at home also contain a vast

amount of screentime, which our children not only get to hear but also observe many different brand-new objects and colours.

Secondly, music plays a specifically crucial role in the Language Development Department of a toddler

Although being two separate languages, believe it or not, music and mother tongue development are two relatable factors that come hand in hand along one's childhood.

According to the mentioned source Carnegie Hall, by just watching others singing, our toddlers can pick up from the mouth shapes and melodies, hence they will try to imitate the habit. And do not laugh at babies' babbling and the funny sounds they outspokenly produce, another point from the article said that all these are elementary for one to develop a wider range of vocabularies than others.

One more point that needs to be set forth about music and its wonders on our child is the help with other languages. A source of paper from Helen Doron addressed a more important aspect when it comes to music and its improvement of language for our children. First, it stated that listening to music is one of the activities where our whole human brain gets involved. Since our brain's left hemisphere is associated with the inputs and outputs of language, this undoubtedly benefits a baby when it comes to learning or acquiring a new language. Moreover, the piece also mentioned how babies tried recognising our mother tongue through the rhythms and nursery rhymes, some might even date back when they were inside of moms' wombs. In fact, when the caregivers play a nursery song sung with a different language, it could give our children a glance of other cultures

from around the world.

Thirdly, and just as fundamental as letters and numbers, the earlier the introduced the better

In such an ambiguous way, a vast majority of Asian parents genuinely believe that their children would achieve high flying colours from a very young age if they were able to read and write as soon as possible. However, this expectative idea was never scientifically proven to be true, and usually make the parents emphasise on only academic aspects. Most of them have one mutual idea, which is as soon as possible. Like the international music master and educator Cheryl Lavender once said: “The fact that children can make beautiful music is less significant than the fact that music can make beautiful children”.

According to T&F Online, many required skills and attributes are best developed during a child’s early ages. These include musical competencies such as auditory and perceptual skills, sense of beat and rhythm, ability to sing in tune, etc. Even more essential are the child’s cognitive functions, self-regulatory skills and executive functions are demanded basis for one to be enjoying and practically good at music.

At the end of the day, the sooner our children get to interact with music and its related activities, the better for them. As stated by NafME, The National Association for Music Education, any child from even before birth to 8 years old is ready to be introduced to music, music engagements and music learning. Your little cuties could surely take advantage and make progress with both their psychological and physical skill set if introduced and educated following music at the right time.

Elementary kids and the current situation of music education in Vietnam (from pre-K to secondary school)

Firstly, how the art of music help advantage children in their academic years.

In the previous part, we have discussed the certainty of music education accelerating our children’s cerebral development. Indubitably, this extraordinary favour would later lead to our kids’ flourishing in their academic achievements, especially in the elementary school. Henceforth, it would also prepare them for a better future in their higher upcoming scholarly years as well.

In a recent documented paper by Edutopia, it listed the following sentences from successful author Nina Kraus: “Teachers resoundingly tell me that children who play music also do better in school.

Young musicians also tend to have stronger language and reading skills than non-musicians because their brains have spent more time actively “engaging with sound. What is important is that engaging with sound changes and strengthens how the brain responds to sound.” Clearly, we can see quite a remarkable comparison between musical children and non-musical ones.

In another source from AEP-ARTS, the writer put the focal point on young children’s attentive abilities. Such skills as their visual focus, active listening or staying on assigned task are vital when it comes to academic as well as occupational performance consecutively in their lives. Based on research by others (Neville et al., 2008), it is stated that learning instrumental music contributes a ton in this aspect, while continued practice throughout adolescence helps strengthen and maintain these advantages. Furthermore, the writer emphasised by declaring instrumental music as an “essential building block of engagement, a competency necessary for success in school and the workforce.” Another important note to pick up in this is the comparison between students who take music in middle school versus ones who do not. It has been pointed out that the musical counterparts were able to achieve much higher scores in ninth grade algebra in contrast to the inferiors of their peers. The fact that instrumental music improved one’s mathematical skills has been conducted after several scientific researches: “These findings hold true regardless of socio-economic status and race/ethnicity.” (Baker, 2011; Catterall, 1998). “Additionally, students involved in instrumental music do better in algebra, a gateway for later achievement.” (Helmrich, 2010; U.S. National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008). It doesn’t stop at only maths, studies found music had helped a bunch of students with their verbal memory, also known as what they could remember during verbal lessons.

*Secondly, social impact for the first years at school.*

Enough talking about scholarly achievements, there is an even more fundamental aspect to life in schools called social interaction. On this, music tasks not only help create the environment for young students in class but also build cooperation and teamwork between them. Playing musical instruments as a band certainly encourages the sharing to learn and teach our children that they can achieve much more when they work as a united

single unit.

According to Edutopia, if a child is consistently getting music education, his or her social-emotional skills will be enhanced by a large margin. While Carnegie Hall affirmed that younglings normally develop their expressions and feelings during the early years. This time is also when they try to figure out how to read other people's emotions through their facial showings. "Through music, children can invent games, songs, and stories that help them harness their feelings. Researchers observing music and movement classes have documented that participation in arts activities correlates with positive feelings for preschoolers and facilitates their ability to regulate their emotions." All in all, the art of music is like a bridge connecting our children with one another and fostering their social basis, helping them reach for a more complex variety of emotions. In addition to that, along the public relationship comes great personalities, the best are perseverance, high self-esteem, adaptability, and extraversion.

*Thirdly, the current situation of music education for the Vietnamese youths*

Let us look at the favourite genres and music taste of young children in Vietnam. Primarily according to Mrs. Nguyen Cam Le from the Department of culture and sports, most students in Vietnam normally listen to commercial pop, whether it's the Western, K-pop or V-pop. After 30 years working in the music education industry, Mrs. Le confidently conducted that the children who do not practise any musical instrument from an early age would normally have a rather common taste in mainstream music.

As aforementioned in the abstract, the Vietnamese parents tend to focus more on their children's achievements in the "main" subject groups, such as group A (Math, Physics, Chemistry), group D (Math, Literature, English) or group C (Literature, History, Geography). Due to this biased way of thinking, subjects like Music are left behind and its importance on our children are often underrated. From Vietnam Communist Party online newspaper, this accentuated once again the fact that parents in our country usually invest in a child's extra curricula or mentoring on so-called "main" subjects. This raises up a conception called "implicit knowledge", where these Math, Literature or English could never provide.

In a research constructed by Ton Nu Dieu Hang in Da Nang preschools, she discovered that young toddlers do not do so well in these musical criteria: remembering and understanding a song, singing a

song clearly and dancing, moving along. First, the research found that only 28% of kids could explain the full meaning of a song, 32% could explain the educational value and 40% left could not explain anything. Second, only 6.25% of them could breathe naturally and perform a song accurately, average level is 18.25%, the rest are a large 57.75% in mediocre level and a 17.5% with weak performances. Last but not least, only 8.3% could move according to a song, 16.6% could do it in an ordinary way, a huge 49% of the children could only do a little bit, the rest 26.1% could not accomplish the task.

In another source called mamnon.com, author Hoang Van Tien wrote that music educational activities are usually narrowed within national schools, and a small number of private schools. They even investigated and found that students who skip pre-Ks do not have music courses. They only get to interact with music through screens and CDs. Teachers could not sing the songs in the right rhythm, and must sing it over too many times. Students who participate in musical activities always listen to music on CDs and media. This tends to lead to low efficiency of musical sessions. Due to this, young learners often get disinterested in following the progress and studying music.

Ultimately, we can see the much-needed importance and positive impacts that music education could do for our young children. Nevertheless, there exist still many uncertainties and controversial opinions on this in our country, especially from the parents' point of view. To address this problem, we need to innovate solutions to both make learners more enthusiastic with music and more importantly, inform and change Vietnamese parents' way of thinking on the subject and its position in our educational system.

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